

Edwards: Historic New GI Bill of Rights Becomes Law, Cover Veterans' 4 Year College Costs

(Washington, D.C.) – U.S. Representative Chet Edwards hailed the historic new GI Bill for the 21st Century, which President Bush signed into law today under the 2008 emergency war funding bill. The new GI Bill expands the current veterans' education benefit to fully cover four-year college costs for U.S. service members.

"This is a major victory for America's veterans," said Edwards, who pushed for passage of the landmark bill as Chairman of the House Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Subcommittee. "Supporting our troops, our veterans and their families is what Americans do. It is who we are. Since our nation's founding, shared sacrifice during time of war has been a quintessential American value, a promise to keep. Today, the new GI Bill is now the law of the land, and our veterans deserve no less."

More than 215,273 Texas troops have been deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan since 2001 and 34,149 are currently deployed. Current benefits pay only about 70 percent of a public college education and 30 percent of a private college education for these veterans when they return home. The expanded GI Bill will restore full, four-year college scholarships to veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars to help make them part of an economic recovery like the veterans of World War II. The legislation will also allow veterans to transfer those benefits to family members.

"A young president, a veteran of the greatest generation, once reminded the world that Americans would 'pay any price, bear any burden...in order to assure the survival and the success of liberty.' His, the generation of John F. Kennedy, understood that all Americans had a moral obligation to support those who have paid the greatest price and borne the heaviest burdens of war—our troops, our veterans and their families.

"Today, 64 years after the original G.I. Bill first became law, Congress has renewed its moral commitment to those who have served our nation in uniform with a new 21st Century GI Bill that opens the doors of our colleges and universities to our troops, our veterans and their families. The new 21st Century GI Bill says to our troops and veterans, just as you have invested your service to protect our nation's future, we intend to invest in your future by making the dream of a college education a reality."

The legislation signed into law today also includes \$161.8 billion that will support the cost of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan through the summer of 2009. In his first year as Chairman in 2007, Congressman Edwards authored a historic increase of \$11.8 billion in veterans' health care and benefits, the largest increase in veterans funding in the 77-year history of the Veterans Administration (VA). Last week, the House Appropriations Committee unanimously passed the fiscal year 2009 VA Appropriations bill, which increases VA spending by \$2.9 billion above the President's request and \$4.6 billion more than the historic fiscal year

2008 level.

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